

Shall I Stay ...

... or Shall I Go?

A sermon given on Palm Sunday, 13th April 2025, by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster.

The Passion According to Matthew - 27:1-54

On Palm Sunday, we stand on the threshold of Holy Week, journeying towards the heart of the gospel story, the heart of Jesus's ministry and the heart of our faith. In the midst of all the unfolding events of Holy Week, you could say that it boils down to two choices being made - choices about whether to stay or whether to go. On the one hand, there is the choice made by Jesus, the Son of God, a choice made to stay and not to go; it's the choice revealed in Jesus's decision to enter Jerusalem publicly and on a donkey echoing the humility of the triumphant king foretold by the prophet Zechariah and in the process throwing down the gauntlets to all the earthly powers in that city; it's the choice to stay that is tested in Gethsemane when Jesus said to his Father, *"Not what I want, but what you want"*; it's the choice underlined when Jesus rebukes Peter for wielding a sword saying, *"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?"* Again and again Jesus has the opportunity to turn away, to escape, or to resist. But instead of going, he stays - and he accepts his fate out of obedience to his Father and out of love for his people.

On the other hand, there is the choice made by God the Father to allow the Son to go and not ask him to stay in the safety and security of heaven: it's a choice the Father makes in the conceiving of a child in Mary by the Holy Spirit, allowing him to take the risk of being born as one of us; it's a choice made in the anointing of Jesus at his baptism when the Holy Spirit came down as a dove and the voice from heaven said, *"This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased"* - that moment when Jesus was launched upon his public ministry and the Father released him into the world; it's a choice made by the Father to leave Jesus dying on the cross, crying out, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* - the Father chooses not to insist that the Son stays, but rather he lets the Son go. And the result is that death becomes part of the experience of the Godhead as the relationship between Father and Son is ruptured on the cross.

So throughout Holy Week, we see this balance of choices between whether to stay or whether to go.

So I wonder what choices you face this Holy week? Are there any situations where you are tempted to back off, to keep your distance, to protect yourself or even to run away, when God is actually asking you to stay and to face it out? Or on the other hand are there people you love; people you want to protect; people you want to keep near; people you want to defend from difficulty or pain or even risk; people you want to protect from everything that life might throw at them; people you want to do things for because you're worried they might not manage by themselves - but whom God is actually asking you to release and let go and manage by themselves.

And I wonder how does the question affect you this week - should I stay or should I go?

In the gospel story, we see other characters responding in different ways: at the last supper, Judas goes when he might have stayed and remained loyal to Jesus; in Gethsemane, Jesus invited his disciples to stay with him - to stay awake, to watch and pray - but they can't keep it up and they escape into sleep; at the cross, all the disciples run away - they go, except for the women who stay at the foot of the cross, resisting the desire to try and protect themselves from the pain of what is going on.

And so in these little episodes, we may choose to see ourselves, little decisions leading to loyalty or to betray; faithfulness or defensiveness; giving or protecting.

At the beginning of Holy Week, we know the King is coming: the time is drawing near; the Kingdom is dawning - so what is it to be? Shall I stay or shall I go?